



# HEIGHT OF DARKNESS:

*Chinese Colonialism on the World's Roof*

*Tibetan Response to Beijing's White Paper of  
8 November 2001*

*Dharamsala, 10 December 2001*







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*They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force – nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others. They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. It was just a robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind – as is very proper for those who tackle darkness. The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much.*

— *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad

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## FOREWORD

*Height of Darkness: Chinese Colonialism on the World's Roof* is in response to the white paper on China's claims to have modernised Tibet, issued by the State Council of the People's Republic of China on 8 November 2001. The Tibetan response is a study of the hidden agenda behind China's frantic efforts to reinforce colonialism in Tibet. After the Chinese communist occupation of Tibet, perhaps this is the biggest disaster to confront the Tibetan people. Despite the brutality of the Cultural Revolution, China was not able to wipe out Tibet's gentle civilisation whose rich spiritual tradition even now vibrates well beyond Tibet. Where brute military might and outright political repression has failed, China now is attempting to exterminate Tibet's unique way of life through renewed colonisation.

Our response highlights the past independent status of Tibet and the true nature of Tibet's traditional social system. It also examines the degree of autonomy in the so-called "Tibet Autonomous Region" and other Tibetan areas. It looks into the compulsions behind China's economic development in Tibet and the state of education. Our response examines China's atrocious track record in trampling upon the human rights of the Tibetan people, the increasing attempts by the Chinese authorities to undermine the Tibetan language and the appalling state of the health service in the so-called "Tibet Autonomous Region" and beyond.

This study constitutes a cautionary note to the Chinese leadership of the unpredictable consequences it might be forced to live with if Beijing persists in its present policy of bypassing His Holiness the Dalai Lama and attempting to determine a future for the Tibetan people without any meaningful Tibetan participation. The present policy, formulated out of fear and in total disregard for the genuine

concerns of the Tibetan people, is exacerbating the problems of instability that China is trying hard to eliminate in Tibet.

In view of this, it is in China's own self-interest to accept His Holiness the Dalai Lama's long-standing offer to solve the issue of Tibet based on China's genuine security concerns and the reasonable and just aspirations of the Tibetan people. His Holiness the Dalai Lama's Middle-Way Approach of not seeking outright independence, but for Tibet to exist and function as a distinct entity in the overall framework of the People's Republic of China, is the most effective pill for China's Tibet headache. A stable, prosperous China is in everyone's interest, including that of the Tibetan people. This can be accomplished if Beijing considers His Holiness the Dalai Lama as an ally who has the influence and ability to help in restoring to China the greatness that the Chinese people deserve and the leadership seeks.

Samdhong Rinpoche

Kalon Tripa and Kalon for the Department of Information and International Relations

10 December 2001



## The Yellow Man's Burden

In whatever form it comes, whether as the White man's or Yellow man's burden, colonialism breeds a library of self-serving literature. The first colonial breed roamed the world, backed by the persuasive power of gunboats and chanting the slogan of "civilisation." They stayed on, constructing roads, building railway lines, setting up schools and taking over the native administrative, all geared towards plundering native resources. When they departed, they left behind atrophied cultures, damaged psyches, divided countries and most of the present problems that afflict our world.

Western colonialism started around 1500 with the discovery of new sea routes to Asia and the Americas. By discovery, conquest and settlement, the seafaring nations of Europe colonised much of the world, which triggered the process of Western dominance of the globe for more than 400 years. Within these long centuries, Europe extracted the resources of its colonial peripheries and in return the colonies received a library of verbiage as a justification for this plunder.

The latest in the long line of these colonial worthies is China. Shouting the slogan of "liberation", China swept across Tibet, justifying its invasion with promises of transforming Tibet into a "socialist paradise." Fifty or more years later, "liberation" turned into occupation and the socialism, much less "socialist paradise," never came because it was flung into the dustbin of history by the present Chinese colonial power. After 50 years, the colonial nature of Chinese rule in Tibet remains the same; but the justification for China's claim in continuing to occupy Tibet has changed. The new mantra backing China's colonial presence in Tibet is "modernisation."

It is an interesting twist, and a new argument that might or might not convince the international community. Liberation, socialism and modernisation are pretty words that hide a huge ugly fact. Or the current Chinese "modernisation" argument — to quote Joseph Conrad in his *Heart of Darkness*, the classic examination of the grim realities of imperialism — "is not a pretty thing when you look too much into it". The "modernisation" mantra remains a persuasive argument to hide the naked truth of China's growing need to exploit the abundant resources of Tibet to feed the resource-hungry economy of its dynamic coastal areas.

Western colonialism used intellectual sophistry to rationalise its greed for resources and energy. China is no different. In fact, being the newcomer in the long line of colonial worthies, China can pick and choose any of the old, neat, intellectual arguments used by others to explain the dirty business of plundering resources which, legally speaking, belong to others. In the classic colonial style, China too has churned out a library of self-serving literature to excuse its plunder of the resources of the world's roof.

The latest is the spin-doctoring transforming China's brutal colonial rule in Tibet into "modernisation". The occasion for China using the "modernisation" argument was Beijing's commemoration of its 50 years of colonial rule in Tibet. On 8 November the Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China issued a white paper called *Tibet's March Toward Modernisation*. The latest Chinese white paper, as usual, white washes Chinese atrocities in Tibet. There is no mention of the Cultural Revolution, leave alone the other atrocities committed on the Tibetan people, including the 1.2 million Tibetans who died as a direct result of the Chinese communist occupation of Tibet.



## **"Modernisation", an Argument to Justify China's Colonial Rule in Tibet**

The main argument of Beijing's white paper is that Chinese rule has transformed Tibet into a modern society and that modernisation has brought great benefits to the Tibetan people. To buttress this argument, the white paper rattles off an impressive list of statistics. These statistics themselves are suspect; but we will come to this later. First let us focus at some length on the meaning and implications of modernisation. What is modernity? What does being modern imply? What are the real indices of modernisation? Is modernisation simply westernisation? Or, as the Chinese authorities seem to imply, is modernisation the Sinicisation of Tibet?

The Chinese white paper forgets to mention that the real measure of whether a society is judged modern is whether the people who make up a particular society have the right to freely exercise their collective will, and whether that they enjoy democratic rights and possess the ability to exercise these rights. These are the defining criteria of a truly modern society.

Measured against this definition of a modern society, the social order China has created in Tibet woefully and painfully flunks the test of a truly modern society. In fact, the Tibetan people — like the Chinese themselves — are straining under the crushing weight of a totalitarian one-party dictatorship, an obsolete political system now discarded by the rest of the world and dumped where it truly belongs in history's junkyard.

In contrast, consider the Tibetan community established in exile. This vibrant, cohesive refugee community is blessed with democracy and democratic rights. The recent electoral change has successfully ensured that the exile Tibetan community can now directly elect the Kalon Tripa, the chairman of the Kashag (Cabinet). In fact, the reason for the sudden outburst of official Chinese pique and wrath, as displayed in the white paper, is because the exile Tibetan community under the leadership of His Holiness the Dalai Lama has stolen a march on Beijing on the road towards modernisation. The same Chinese anger was displayed when the people of Taiwan — for the first time in more than 5,000 years of Chinese history — went to the polls and elected Lee Teng-hui as their President. These examples of democracy will compel Tibetans in Tibet and Chinese in the PRC to ask the same question. If they can do this there, why are we not allowed to vote in our leadership here? So the latest Chinese white paper on Tibet is largely a response to the fundamental democratic changes underway this side of the Himalayas, and to how these changes will strengthen the will, stamina and staying power of Tibetan as they continue their struggle for a future shaped by their collective will. November's white paper is a bark from a dog startled by the sudden appearance of this menacing stranger called Democracy.

So the infrastructure set up by China throughout Tibet is designed primarily to speed up China's exploitation of Tibet's resources. The latest white paper calls this structure "modernisation." The collateral economic benefit Tibetans reap from these development activities is a side issue. The increasingly massive presence of new Chinese settlers throughout Tibet, with better skills and a political structure bias in their favour, prevents the majority of Tibetans from



benefiting from the new economic development. The late Gerald Segal, a respected China expert, wrote in *Foreign Affairs* — perhaps the most influential magazine on international affairs — “Tibet, Xinjiang, Mongolia and other fringe territories, most of which have strong cases for ethnically based independence, have reaped relatively little benefit from economic decentralisation.”<sup>1</sup>

In short, earlier Communist China looked at Tibet more from a geopolitical and security perspective. Now, coupled with this enduring imperial reason for staying put in Tibet, an economically vibrant China looks to Tibet as the best source for coastal China’s galloping demand for energy, fuel and water. The devastating impact of this change of purpose in colonising the plateau is already felt in Tibet as Tibetans — unable to compete with more skilled Chinese settlers — are becoming increasingly marginalised by the forces of globalisation unleashed on the roof of the world. Having already lost their country, Tibetans in increasing numbers are also losing their jobs to Chinese settlers streaming in Tibet to take advantage of the economic boom.

This shift of Chinese utilisation of its imperial fringes — from being mere imperial outposts to resource-rich colonies to supply raw materials to maintain the PRC pace of dynamic growth — should be of enormous concern to the so-called minorities who inhabit these vast regions, richly endowed with natural resources. It should equally be of concern to the rest of the world, as the competition for fast-depleting natural resources is reaching a new heights and ferocity.

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<sup>1</sup> *China's Changing Shape*, Gerald Segal, Volume 73 No.3 of *Foreign Affairs*, Council on Foreign Relations, New York, 1994.

## Strategic Compulsions Behind Developing 'China's Wild West'

The reasons why China's perpetual need for resources and energy is now fuelling the rhetoric of "modernisation" of Tibet lie in the focus of development moving from the Chinese coastal region to the interior. There are several important reasons for the shift of focus of economic development from east to west. Modernising Tibet to benefit Tibetans does not figure in any of them. The motives lie more in the "motherland" extracting the resources of its colonial periphery and in turn exporting its excess population onto the vast empty lands of the native Tibetans. And the underlying realpolitik lies in questions of the stability of the current Beijing regime, and the political and social problems that accompany unprecedented economic development.

In the late 1970s, when the seemingly endless power struggle which characterised the Cultural Revolution eventually came to an end and threw up Deng Xiaoping as China's new strongman, the new leader abandoned the excesses and madness of Mao Zedong's policies and launched China into an unprecedented economic reform. The entrepreneurial genius, the flair for making money, and the energy and hard work of the Chinese people, long trapped and stifled within socialist walls, were unleashed. Within a decade the economic landscape of China was changed beyond recognition. It was an economic miracle. Historians and observers consider China's breathtaking economic performance as bringing the greatest degree of prosperity to the greatest number of people in the shortest period in all of human history.

But there was a problem. The new flow of riches was confined to China's eastern seaboard. The interior, and the vast



stretches of territory inhabited by the Mongols, Uighurs and Tibetans, remained as poor as in the era of Mao. For a decade or so, the Chinese authorities took no notice of this glaring economic disparity between the developing east and the poor west. Then the greatest mass migration in human history took place. Lured by the prosperity of the eastern seaboard, and wanting a share in that prosperity, Chinese peasants in frightening masses migrated to the big cities of eastern China. Gerald Segal observed, "The fact that economic modernisation and reform have already moved 130 million Chinese off the countryside and into towns and cities – with another 200 million set to migrate soon – creates a situation of fundamental political and social change, leaving much revolutionary tinder scattered around the country." <sup>2</sup>

Apart from the obvious social tensions this mass migration threw up, there were three pertinent issues that caught the attention of the Chinese leadership. One was that the dynamic economic growth of eastern China required an easy and constant supply of resources and energy to sustain growth. The other was that the mass concentration of an increasing number of Chinese migrants in the developing coastal regions was straining both the resources and the infrastructure of these regions. The third issue that concerned the Beijing leadership was that the developmental successes of the eastern Chinese seaboard were alienating the country's impoverished western regions. The fear developed that these regions may spin out of Chinese control unless economically integrated with the mainstream.

These are some of the compelling reasons for Beijing to devise the Western China Development Programme, the leadership's

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<sup>2</sup> *China's Changing Shape* Gerald Segal, *Foreign Affairs*, 1994

panacea for the three problems outlined above. The creation of a parallel dynamic economy in China's west will attract migrant workers in the opposite direction, thus easing the strain of over-population on the eastern seaboard. The development of the western regions will make it easier for China to exploit the natural resources and enormous energy potential of these regions, like oil and gas, to meet the galloping energy demands of eastern China. A prosperous western China, and the vast areas inhabited by so-called minorities, will enhance Beijing's ability to control and rule the region. The prosperity of the western region will attract countless unemployed Chinese workers into so-called minority regions; their sheer demographic weight will forever cement Chinese rule in these far-flung corners of the Chinese communist empire.

The intellectual framework for bridging the east-west divide was provided by Wang Xiaoqiang and Bai Nanfeng in their groundbreaking book, *The Poverty of Plenty*. In the introduction to the book, Angela Knox, the translator, says, "Historically, China has a long tradition of making vassal states serve imperial aims. Its geopolitical strategy since 1949 with regard to the border regions shows many similarities with previous practice. Where once vassal states provided tribute to the Chinese emperor, they are now expected to provide raw materials and natural resources... The economic and political integration of outlying regions has been and still is crucial."<sup>3</sup>

Angela Knox points out, "Seeing the east-west divide in economic terms alone omits a whole range of important issues. One defining characteristic of the western regions

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<sup>3</sup> *The Poverty of Plenty*, Wang Xiaoqiang and Bai Nanfeng, St. martin's Press, New York, 1991



which has a major bearing on the divide is the ethnic difference". Angela Knox says that the western region and "its neighbouring areas contain over 72 per cent of China's total non-Han population and consist largely of territories not fully integrated socially, culturally or economically with China proper"<sup>4</sup>.

These fears, first articulated by the authors of *The Poverty of Plenty*, became the basis of the formulation and implementation of the Western China Development Programme. They wrote, "China's ethnic unity and social stability is closely tied up with the economic growth and prosperity of these regions. The yawning gulf in the level of economic development which exists between the developed regions on the coast and in the interior and the backward border regions populated by ethnic minorities may bring with it a series of delicate social problems – of a nationalist character, for instance. We can say with certainty that even if we manage to solve the economic problems ... we nevertheless have no means of eliminating the possibility of upset in ethnic and social stability."<sup>5</sup>

The two economists urged the Chinese authorities to look into the problem and come up with suitable solutions. They wrote, "We have before us a vast array of serious problems which urgently require investigation and policy decisions. Of course, it is not just the lack of development in undeveloped regions that will prove the decisive factor. However, looking into the future, research into solutions to the problems of backwardness in these regions, be it with a view to China's economic growth or social stability, will be of vital strategic and theoretical importance that is hard to visualise."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

More than a decade later, China came up with an overall solution to the pressing problems first articulated by Wang and Bai in, *The Poverty of Plenty*. According to the London based Tibet Information Network's publication, *China's Great Leap West*, "President Jiang Zemin launched the Western China Development Programme in a speech he made in Xian on 17 June 1999. The initial emphasis of the campaign was on acceleration of development focusing on the western regions of China – the Tibet, Xinjiang Uighur and Ningxia Autonomous Regions, Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, Yunnan, Shaanxi and Guizhou provinces and Chongqing municipality – totalling 56 per cent of China's land area and 23 per cent of the population. Party speeches on the subject were little more than lists of ideals and grand plans, devoid of context on implementation or priorities."<sup>7</sup>

Despite the vagueness of the economic priorities of the Western China Development Programme in the initial announcement, its political compulsions were clearly articulated right from the start. "Party leaders have explicitly linked the success of the campaign to the survival of the Party. Jiang Zemin has been quoted as saying that the campaign 'has major significance for the future prosperity of the country and the (Party's) long reign and perennial stability'."<sup>8</sup> On 18 September 2000, President Jiang Zemin was quoted by *China Daily* as commenting that developing the west "will help develop China's economy, stabilise local society and contribute to China's unity".

But external developments also forced China to speed up the pace of implementation of its Western China Development

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<sup>7</sup> *China's Great Leap West*, Tibet Information Network, London, November 2000, p. 5

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6



Programme. NATO military intervention in the war in Kosovo was perceived by the nervous regime in Beijing as a dangerous precedent set by the West to interfere in a nation's internal affairs. Hu Angang, an economist at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said, "The worst case scenario – and what we're trying to avoid – is China fragmenting like Yugoslavia... Already, regional (economic) disparity is equal to – or worse than – what we saw in Yugoslavia before it split."

A Chinese economist living in the West, quoted in Tiber Information Network's *China's Great Leap West*, explained it all when he said, "First of all the Chinese authorities are looking at the economic aspect: the western areas are very poor, and the standard of living needs to increase. But Beijing is also concerned about the potential for social unrest, due to poverty and nationalistic feelings in areas such as Tibet and Xinjiang. Their real fear is that the west could become another Chechnya. That is the origin of the campaign to develop the west."

So the solution China came up with to solve its pressing problems in Tibet and elsewhere in the western region was the Western China Development Programme. Behind the magnanimous-sounding title lurks the colonial power's greed for natural resources and its need to control and extinguish any native restlessness so as to facilitate Beijing's continued exploitation of native resources. Much of the "development" in the Western China Development Programme consists of construction of infrastructure: building of roads, railway lines, airports and other forms of communication, all geared towards facilitating exploitation of natural resources and transporting these resources to the resource-hungry coastal areas.

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<sup>9</sup> *Newsweek International*, 2 July 2000

It is this aspect of the Western China Development Programme that is worrying Tibetans on the plateau. A Tibetan currently living in Lhasa summed up some of the deeper fears connected to the development of the west when he told Tibet Information Network: "The western development project aims to transfer large numbers of Chinese for permanent settlement into areas inhabited by minority nationalities, exploit mineral resources, and above all to bear down heavily on people for perceived political intransigence. Contrary to the claims of a 'rare opportunity' for the minority nationalities, this campaign represents a period of emergency and darkness."<sup>10</sup>

So contrary to the officially-expressed benign intentions of the Western China Development Programme, the real reasons and compulsions that are forcing the Chinese authorities to develop this vast, troublesome region is to ensure that the forces of the market economy will succeed in fully integrating "China's Wild West" into China proper. China hopes that the forces of globalisation will tame its Wild West and solve all of China's enduring, imperial problems. If the Tibet component of Western China Development Programme works it will solve two fundamental problems China faces on the roof of the world and a host of other collateral problems.

Construction of more roads, airports and the railway line from Gormo to Lhasa will ensure that Tibetan resources, both on the ground and under the ground, will go to China and China can more easily export its excess population back to Tibet. More Chinese settlement of the Tibetan plateau will cement Chinese rule and further contribute to Tibet's economic integration into the mainstream Chinese economy.

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<sup>10</sup> *China's Great Leap West*, Tibet Information Network, November 2000, p. 3



The agenda behind China's modernisation of Tibet is best expressed by Gabriel Lafitte, an expert on the Tibetan economy and a Fellow at the Institute of Asian Language and Societies, University of Melbourne. He writes in his perceptive article, *Economic Colonisation*, "China is globalising Tibet. Foreign investment, high technology, stock exchange share floats, railways, hydro-dams, gas and electricity grids are all coming to Tibet, in a campaign orchestrated by Beijing."

Lafitte writes, "China is in a hurry to integrate its western half, tap its resources and deal with the deep discontent at being left behind by the booming coast. China's great leap westward is to be financed by global capital as well as through China's latest Five-Year Plan."

"Recent investments in extraction of Tibetan resources for China's use have grabbed headlines: BP, Agip, Enron, Exxon and AES are amongst the multinationals involved. Their investments will mine Tibetan salt lakes, dam Tibetan rivers for hydro-electricity, and extract huge quantities of natural gas, all to be taken immediately to China, where demand is great," Gabriel Lafitte points out. He further adds, "But these investments are part of a much wider, long term strategy, which the Communist Party defines as its historic task to develop the west. It signals what the Tibetans have dreaded for decades, a real Chinese determination to absorb Tibet into the Chinese economy."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Economic Colonisation*, Gabriel Lafitte, *Free Tibet*, Free Tibet Campaign, London, Autumn 2001

## Traditional Society and Democracy in the Exile Tibetan Community

China has always tried to justify its invasion and occupation of Tibet and the repressive policies it imposes there by painting the darkest picture of Tibet's traditional society. China considers its military invasion and occupation of Tibet as "liberation" of Tibetan society from "medieval feudal serfdom" and "slavery".

It is true that traditional Tibetan society — like most of its Asian contemporaries — was backward and badly in need of reforms. However, it is completely wrong to use the word "feudal" from the perspective of medieval Europe to describe traditional Tibetan society. Tibet before the invasion, in fact, was far more egalitarian than most Asian countries of that time. Hugh Richardson, who spent a total of nine years in Lhasa as British India's last, and independent India's first, representative, wrote: "Even communist writers have had to admit there was no great difference between the rich and poor in [pre-1949] Tibet."<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the International Commission of Jurists' Legal Inquiry Committee points out that: "Chinese allegations that the Tibetans enjoyed no human rights before the entry of the Chinese were found to be based on distorted and exaggerated accounts of life in Tibet."<sup>13</sup>

In terms of social mobility and wealth distribution, independent Tibet compared favourably with most Asian countries of the time. The Tibetan polity before the Chinese

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<sup>12</sup> *Tibet and its History*, H.E. Richardson, Oxford University Press, London, 1962

<sup>13</sup> *Tibet and the Chinese People's Republic*, A Report to the International Commission of Jurists by its Legal Inquiry Committee on Tibet, Geneva, 1960



occupation was not theocratic as China wants us to believe. The system of rule was referred to as *choesi-sungdrel*, which describes a political system based on the Buddhist tenets of compassion, moral integrity and equality. According to this system, the government must be based on high moral standards and serve the people with love and compassion, just as parents care for their children. This system of governance is based on the belief that all sentient beings have the seed of Buddhahood and should be respected accordingly.

The Dalai Lama, head of both the spiritual and secular administration, was discovered through a system of reincarnation that ensured that the rule of Tibet did not become hereditary. Most of the Dalai Lamas, including the 13th and the present 14th, came from average, yeoman families in remote regions of Tibet.

Every administrative post below the Dalai Lama was held by an equal number of monk and lay officials. Although lay officials hereditarily held posts, those of monks were open to all. A large proportion of monk officials came from non-privileged backgrounds.

Furthermore, Tibet's monastic system provided unrestrained opportunities for social mobility. Admission to monastic institutions in Tibet was open to all and the large majority of monks — particularly those who rose through its ranks to the highest positions — came from humble backgrounds, often from far-flung villages in Kham and Amdo. This is because the monasteries offered equal opportunities to all to rise to any monastic post through their own scholarship. A popular Tibetan aphorism says: "If the mother's son has knowledge, the golden throne of Gaden [the highest position in the hierarchy of the Gelugpa School of Tibetan Buddhism] has no ownership."

The peasants, whom Chinese propaganda insists on calling "serfs", had a legal identity, often with documents stating their rights, and also had access to courts of law. Peasants had the right to sue their masters and carry their case in appeal to higher authorities.

Ms. Dhondub Choedon comes from a family that was among the poorest in the social strata of independent Tibet. Reminiscing on her life before the Chinese occupation, she writes: "I belong to what the Chinese now term as serfs of Tibet... There were six of us in the family... My home was a double-storied building with a walled compound. On the ground floor we used to keep our animals. We had four yaks, 27 sheep and goats, two donkeys and a land-holding of four and a half khel (0.37 hectares) ... We never had any difficulty earning our livelihood. There was not a single beggar in our area."<sup>14</sup>

Throughout Tibetan history, the maltreatment and suppression of peasants by estate-holders was forbidden by law as well as by social convention. Starting from the reign of Emperor Songtsen Gampo in the seventh century, many Tibetan rulers issued codes based on the Buddhist principle of "Ten Virtues of the Dharma". The essence of this was that the rulers should act as parents to their subjects. This was reflected in Songtsen Gampo's code of 16 general moral principles, and the code of 13 rules of procedure and punishment issued by Phagmodrupa in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and revised by the Fifth Dalai Lama in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

There were some punishments, sanctioned by law, in the past which included mutilation such as the cutting off of a hand

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<sup>14</sup> *Life in the Red Flag People's Commune*, Dhondub Choedon, Information Office, Dharamsala, 1978



or foot and putting out an eye. Such punishments were never lightly used but were decreed only in cases of repeated crime. Flogging was the principal punishment. Even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century although the power to inflict mutilation existed in theory it was only rarely put into practice. Capital punishment was banned in Tibet, and physical mutilation was a punishment that could be inflicted by the Central Government of Lhasa alone. In 1898, Tibet enacted a law abolishing such forms of punishment, except in the cases of high treason or conspiracy against the state. The 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama issued a regulation conferring on all peasants the right to appeal directly to him in case of mistreatment by estate holders.

All land belonged to the state which granted estates to monasteries and to individuals who had rendered meritorious service to the state. The state, in turn, received revenues and service from estate holders. Lay estate holders either paid land revenues or provided one male member in each generation to work as a government official. Monasteries performed religious functions for the state and, most vitally, served as schools, universities and centres for Tibetan art, craft, medicine and culture. The role of monasteries as highly disciplined centres of Tibetan education was the key to the traditional Tibetan way of life. Monasteries bore all expenses for their students and provided them with free board and lodging. Some monasteries had large estates; some had endowments which they invested. But other monasteries had neither of these. They received personal gifts and donations from devotees and patrons. The revenue from these sources was often insufficient to provide the basic needs of large monk populations. To supplement their income, some monasteries engaged in trade and acted as moneylenders.

The largest proportion of land in old Tibet was held by peasants who paid their revenue directly to the state, and this became the main source of the government food stocks which were distributed to monasteries, the army, and officials without estates. Some paid in labour, and some were required to provide transport services to government officials, and in some cases to monasteries. Land held by the peasant was hereditary. The peasant could lease it to others or mortgage it. A peasant could be dispossessed of his land only if he failed to pay the dues either in kind or labour, which was not excessive. In practice, he had the rights of a free-holder, and dues to the state were in the form of land tax paid in kind rather than cash.

Small sections of the Tibetan population, mostly in U-Tsang (Central Tibet), were tenants. They held their lands on the estates of aristocrats and monasteries, and paid rent to the estate-holders either in kind or by sending one member of the family to work as a domestic servant or agricultural labourer. Some of these tenant farmers rose to the powerful position of estate secretary. (For this, they were labelled by the communist Chinese "agents of feudal lords"). Other members of these families had complete freedom. They were entitled to engage in any business, follow any profession, and join any monastery or work on their own lands. Although they were known as tenants, they could not be evicted from their lands at the whim of estate holders. Some tenant farmers were quite wealthy.

The 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama had abolished the system of demanding free transport from the local land-holding peasants by officials travelling on duty and had fixed charges for the use of horses, mules and yaks. The 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama went one step further and ordered that in future no transport service should be



demanded without the special sanction of the government. He also increased the rates to be paid for transport services.<sup>15</sup>

Foreigners like Charles Bell, Hugh Richardson, and Heinrich Harrer, who lived and worked in independent Tibet, were impressed by the average standard of living of ordinary Tibetans, which they said was higher than in many Asian countries. Famine and starvation were unheard of in Tibet until the Chinese invasion. There were, of course, years of poor harvests and crop failures. But people could easily borrow from the buffer stock held by the district administrations, monasteries, aristocrats and rich farmers.

When the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama assumed the throne, he constituted a reform committee to introduce fundamental land reforms but the Chinese communists, fearing that these would take the wind out of their sails, prevented His Holiness the Dalai Lama from carrying out his proposed reforms.

In 1959, after his flight to freedom, the Dalai Lama re-established his government in India and initiated a series of democratic reforms. A popularly-elected body of people's representatives, the parliament-in-exile, was constituted. In 1963 a detailed draft constitution for future Tibet was promulgated. Despite strong opposition, the Dalai Lama insisted on the inclusion of a clause empowering the Tibetan parliament to revoke his executive powers by a majority of two-third of its total members in consultation with the Supreme Court, if this was seen to be in the highest interests of the nation.

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<sup>15</sup> *My Land and My People*, The Dalai Lama

In 1990 further democratic changes were introduced by increasing the strength of the Assembly of Tibetan People's Deputies (ATPD) — the defacto parliament — from 12 to 46. It was given more constitutional powers such as the election of *kalons* (ministers), who were previously appointed directly by the Dalai Lama. The Supreme Justice Commission was set up to look into people's grievances against the Administration.

In 2001 the Tibetan parliament, on the advice of the Dalai Lama, amended the exile Tibetan constitution to provide for the direct election of the Kalon Tripa (the chairman of the Cabinet or Kashag) by the exile population.

Looking to future Tibet, in February 1992 the Dalai Lama announced the Guidelines for Future Tibet's Polity and the Basic Features of its Constitution, wherein he stated that he would not "play any role in the future government of Tibet, let alone seek the Dalai Lama's traditional political position". The future government of Tibet, the Dalai Lama said, would be elected by the people on the basis of adult franchise.

## **Practice of Autonomy in the So-called "Tibet Autonomous Region"**

In its November 2001 white paper, China claims that under the democratic reforms of 1959 it introduced the new political system of people's democracy and that Tibetans have become masters of the country. Nothing could be further from the truth. Tibetans have little or no say in running their own affairs. All the decisions of the administration are taken by the Chinese Communist Party through its Regional CCP. Tibetan people's participation in the government is only to rubber stamp Communist Party decisions. Communist Party



members dominate key government posts and only a few important appointments are held by trusted non-party members.

The so-called election of 1961, as referred to in the white paper, was a farce. The new Chinese masters pre-determined the candidates based on their loyalty and class background. The Tibetans were then told to vote for a certain number of candidates. As far as the Tibetans were concerned, the Chinese might as well have appointed the officials without going through the farce of elections.

Tibetans on the plateau do not hold any key positions — even within the “TAR” Communist Party. The Secretary of the “TAR” Communist Party is the most powerful position in the “TAR” and this post has been held by Chinese since 1959 (Zhang Guhua, Zeng Yongya, Ren Rong, Yin Fatang, Wu Jinhua, Hu Jintao, Chen Kuiyuan and now Guo Jinlong). There is racial discrimination against Tibetans. When Chen Kuiyuan was transferred from the “TAR”, Raidi, a Tibetan who held the number two position in the communist hierarchy, should have been appointed in his place. However, Guo Jinlong, a Chinese, who ranked number three, was promoted over Raidi’s head to top the “TAR” administration.

Whatever position a Tibetan occupies in the Chinese bureaucracy in Tibet, he always has a “junior” Chinese official “under” him who exercises the real power. China continues to transfer many Chinese cadres to Tibet, upon whom they rely heavily to govern Tibet.

The population of half of Tibet — living in eastern regions now merged into neighbouring Chinese provinces — are completely deprived of their political identity and labelled an insignificant minority nationality in their own land.

## Economic Development

The white paper states, "The 1980s witnessed a great upsurge of the reform, opening-up and modernisation drive in Tibet, as in other parts of China." This sentence is probably the only truth in the whole report. In 1980, the then Party Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, Hu Yaobang, visited Tibet. Hu was so shocked by what he witnessed that he said the living standard must be brought up to at least the pre-1959 level. After Hu's visit there was a brief period of relaxation and a few genuine liberal measures — reduction of Chinese cadres and handing local administrative power to Tibetan cadres — were taken to let the Tibetans chart their way of life. This was the closest Beijing came to really implementing its rhetoric of "liberation" of Tibet. Sadly, this period lasted less than a decade, after which Beijing reverted back to only thing it knows — more control and suppression.

In 1984, at the Second Work Forum on Tibet, 43 projects were launched with state investment and aid from nine provinces and municipalities. A closer study of the 43 projects reveals that none of these undertakings were meant to improve or make any positive impacts on the lives of ordinary Tibetans, the majority of whom are farmers and nomads. Some of the projects were as fanciful as constructing hotels in Tibet. These projects were clearly not devised to improve the quality of life of Tibetans; they were to reinforce and consolidate the Chinese bureaucratic presence in Tibet and to improve the quality of life in urban areas, where migrant Chinese are in the majority.



Similarly, in 1994 at the Third Work Forum on Tibet, 62 projects were announced to help in the development of Tibet's economy. But what were these 62 projects? The 62 projects were another attempt by the "TAR" administration to obtain more funding from Beijing to make the living conditions of the government cadres and Chinese urban residents more comfortable. The projects were designed to quell complaints and grievances of Chinese residents — cadres, army and the immigrants — who live in the urban areas and to appease them. Almost all the 62 projects were geared towards improving the urban infrastructure in Tibet. Seventeen of the total number comprise energy projects. More than 30 percent of the total investment went to financing these energy projects. A few of these projects were to renovate existing power stations — all supplying power not to local Tibetan households living around the power stations, but to urban areas of Lhasa, Shigatse, Nyingtri, Chamdo, and Nagchu. One supplies much-needed energy to develop the Norbusa Chromite Mine in Lhoka region.

In June 2001, in the wake of the Fourth Work Forum on Tibet, 117 projects were formally announced and ambitious plans were laid out to "develop" Tibet, a part of the Western China Development Programme. A railway line from Gormo (Ch: Golmud) in Tibet's Amdo province (Ch: Qinghai) to Lhasa was announced. Beijing touted it as China's gift and benevolence to meet the Tibetan people's desire for modernity. But Jiang Zemin for once was honest and said during a visit to the United States that the railway project would go ahead at any cost even though it doesn't make any economic sense. Jiang Zemin cited "political" reasons for the decision.

The white paper says, "According to statistics, from 1994 to 2000, the gross domestic product (GDP) in Tibet increased by 130%, or an annual increase of 12.4%. Urban residents' disposable income per capita and the farmers and herdsman's income per capita increased by 62.9 percent and 93.6 percent, respectively; and the impoverished population decreased from 480,000 in the early 1990s to just over 70,000." The paper admits this is "according to statistics" — the same statistics produced by provincial and county authorities, who have become expert in the art of doctoring statistics to please the higher authorities.

It is common knowledge that in China the centre has a policy and the local authorities have a way of circumventing the same policy. Premier Zhu Rongji admitted the unreliability of Chinese statistics. Zhu said that statistics are manipulated by the authorities for their own self-interest. So, what triggered the phenomenal GDP growth rate of 12.4 percent? The white paper says that "tertiary industry" contributed more than 50 percent of the GDP in Tibet. How? Wang Xiaoqing and Bai Nanfeng, authors of *The Poverty of Plenty*, knew about the provincial authorities' propensity to doctor statistics; worse, the two economists got into trouble for telling the truth. They found that "blood transfusion" or subsidies and support from Beijing and other provinces and cities of China have kept the system running in Tibet. The state subsidies and investment fuelled the boom in the construction of infrastructure in urban areas and is reported as economic growth in the accounting of GDP. Who benefits from such growth? The beneficiaries are Chinese officials and the immigrants in urban areas — and not Tibetan farmers and nomads who receive no such benefits from the artificial infusion of capital investment from centre to Tibet.



To sustain this “phenomenal” GDP growth, we see a major increase in the number of projects after each Work Forum — 43, 62 and 117! Local officials in “TAR” play the old reliable trick of raising the politically sensitive issue of “social stability” to get Beijing and other provinces to support their “modernisation” work.

But one might wonder why Beijing is putting so much into Tibet for nothing? It is another matter that Tibet’s resources — forests, medicinal herbs, wildlife, relics, and minerals — belong to the state under Article 9 of the Chinese Constitution, the only article of the constitution that has been consistently and rigorously implemented in Tibet. From Tibet’s forests alone, revenue from timber would be several times higher than what China has poured into Tibet since 1959.

The white paper continues to gloat over the reduction of Tibet’s impoverished population from 480,000 in the early 1990s to just over 70,000. How did Beijing lift more than a quarter of the Tibetan population out of poverty in such a short time? A study by the World Bank tells us how best Beijing has achieved such dramatic poverty so swiftly. By disregarding the internationally accepted poverty line of one US dollar per day or US\$ 365 per year, Beijing has instead used the “Chinese” poverty line of an annual per capita income of 500 yuan at 1990 prices, which comes to around 625 yuan (US\$ 76) as the poverty line<sup>16</sup>. It is obvious why no developing nations follow the Chinese methods of poverty reduction. Furthermore, Tibet had only five designated poor

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<sup>16</sup> *China Development Brief*. <http://www.chinadevelopmentbrief.com/brief.asp>

counties in 1997 according to Chinese statistics, one of the lowest in the whole of China. The Chinese government's Leading Group for Poverty Reduction (LGPR) accepts that more poor people exist outside than within the designated poor counties, and that there is much more to do in the survey of poor people and strategy of poverty eradication. The LGPR also highlights the vested political interests and meddling in the work on poverty reduction in China.

However, in light of Beijing's constant rhetoric over its "liberation" of Tibet, it is a glaring fact that Tibet is still poor and underdeveloped. Based on UNDP's Human Development Reports<sup>17</sup> over the years, "TAR" and other Tibetan areas continue to remain at the bottom among the provinces of China when ranked in terms of the Human Development Index (HDI) and its composite indicators — education, income and health. If the Tibetan areas were to be ranked independently as a nation, it would fall in the category of "low human development" nations like Bangladesh, Djibouti and Haiti.

The white paper says that the so-called "Tibet Autonomous Region" today has 401 power plants, with a total installed capacity of 356 MW and annual energy output of 661 million kWh. In 1990, Wang and Bai, in *The Poverty of Plenty*, reported that there were 816 power plants. What happened to the 415 missing plants?

Most of the power plants were built through forced labour during the era of collectivisation, which means that half of

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<sup>17</sup> UNDP. *China Human Development Report 1997 and 1999*



the power plants had to be scrapped because of shoddy work in the first place. A dam in Chabcha county of Amdo province collapsed in 1993, killing at least 1,257 people. That figure became 300 fatalities according to Chinese government sources. The local Tibetans complained about the safety hazards of the reservoir to the authorities but to no avail. It was only after the tragic collapse that local authorities took some action.

A German organisation working in Central Tibet to develop small hydropower plants reported that more than 70 percent of the population at village level do not have access to electricity. A World Bank study revealed that in the early 1990s more than 127,000 households were not electrified in Central Tibet alone<sup>18</sup>. So where does the electricity from 401 power plants go? It goes to supply power to the Chinese establishment in Tibet that controls Tibetans, and to the Chinese infrastructure that exploits the natural resources of Tibet. All these power stations supply power to the urban areas dominated by ethnic Chinese, and not to Tibetan farmers and nomads who live near the source of powers — solar, geothermal and hydro.

The white paper boasts of the network of highways connecting Tibet to different parts of China and the construction of a new railway from Gormo to Lhasa.<sup>19</sup> The highways and railway line cover thousands of miles to connect Tibet to China. But if Beijing is serious about modernising Tibet, why not open Tibet's access to the nearest

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<sup>18</sup> *China: Renewable Energy and Power Sector*, Report #15592-CHA, World Bank, 1996, pp. 19-25

<sup>19</sup> A detailed report on this railway project is available online. <http://>

seaport from Southern Tibet? Kolkata, India's northeastern seaport, is just 600 km from Tibet's border.

## Education

The overriding goal of Beijing's education policy in Tibet is to instil loyalty to the "Great Motherland" and the Communist Party. Speaking at the "TAR" Conference on Education in Lhasa in 1994, the then regional Party Secretary, Chen Kuiyuan, said, "The success of our education does not lie in the number of diplomas issued to graduates from universities, colleges...and secondary schools. It lies, in the final analysis, in whether our graduating students are opposed to or turn their hearts to the Dalai Clique and in whether they are loyal to or do not care about our great motherland and the great socialist cause..."<sup>20</sup>

This policy has blinded the authorities to a number of core issues relating to human resource development on the plateau. Despite the authorities' claim of having "taken on an important task over the past few decades to develop popular or mass education in Tibet", education — the foundation for the development of human resources — has always been put on the back burner.

In independent Tibet, over 6,000 monasteries and nunneries served as centres of education. In addition, Tibet had many lay schools run by the government as well as by individuals. The Chinese Communist Party labelled these traditional

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<sup>20</sup> "TAR" Party Secretary, Chen Kuiyuan, "Speech on Education in Tibet," Fifth Regional Meeting on Education in "TAR", 26 October 1994



learning centres as hotbeds of "blind faith" and the nurturing ground for "feudal oppression." They were, therefore, targeted for attack and shut down soon after the "liberation" of Tibet.

In their place, the authorities forced Tibetans in agricultural and pastoral areas to establish people-funded schools, known as *mangtsuk lobdra*. Not a single cent of Chinese government grants was spent on these schools and the majority of them could not be regarded as schools by international standards. But these institutes did serve to create impressive statistics for official Chinese propaganda. This is clearly reflected in the following statements of three Chinese sociologists, who said, "There are only 58 middle-level schools (in the "TAR"). Out of them only 13 are real middle schools. Altogether, there are 2,450 primary schools in Tibet. Out of them, only 451 are funded by the government. Over 2,000 of these schools are funded by the people. These schools do not have a sound foundation and are not properly equipped. The level of education is either completely nil or extremely low. Therefore, the question of scientific skills can be ruled out among them. At present 90 percent of farmers and herders do not receive lower middle-level education.

"In view of this, talking about upper-middle school and university education is like asking people to eat well when there is no food grains available. Only 45 percent of the children of school-going age go to primary schools. From them, 10.6 percent manage to graduate to the lower-middle school. In other words, 55 percent of the children do not even get primary-level education. In the whole of the "TAR", there are over 9,000 teachers of various levels, far fewer than the actual number required. Fifty percent of these teachers are

not qualified enough. Equality among nationalities will come about only if this is reformed and improved.”<sup>21</sup>

In the 1980s, Beijing’s liberalised policy encouraged a favourable atmosphere for development of an education system that catered to the needs of Tibetans. Unfortunately, China’s broader economic and strategic interests at that time led to a decrease in state funding for education. As a result, the decade saw the closure of 62 percent of primary schools, and a 43 percent fall in student enrolment.<sup>22</sup>

In the 1990s, the “TAR” was allotted more money for education as a result of the region having been declared a Special Economic Zone. And, in 1994 Beijing adopted a compulsory education policy for the “TAR”. But the budget allocation for education went mostly to state-run schools (*shung-tsuk lobdra*), where Chinese students predominate. Schools in rural areas — where the majority of Tibetans live — continued to be neglected. Qun Zeng, Vice-Director of the Education Commission of the “TAR” said:

There are too many people-funded schools, too many lower classes, too high a proportion of school dropouts and few complete the primary school. For instance, there are a total of 2,800 primary schools in the region, of which 1,787, or 74.5 percent, are people-funded primary schools with crude facilities and low-quality teachers and which can operate no more than the first or second grades of schooling. Of the 500 or so currently-existing government-run primary schools,

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<sup>21</sup> *Tibet Review*, No. 2, PRC

<sup>22</sup> 1995 “TAR” *Statistical Yearbook*, PRC



more than half can operate no more than the first grades of schooling owing to limitations of facilities and teachers. There are only 100 or so complete primary schools actually capable of operating the six grades of elementary education, and most of these are situated in cities and townships above the county level whereas few are to be found in the agricultural and pastoral districts. There is, on average, fewer than a single complete primary school for each of 897 townships in the region, with the result that only about 60.4 percent of school-age children are in school — the lowest rate in all of China.<sup>23</sup>

Besides, with the massive influx of Chinese immigrants on the plateau, the linguistic and cultural needs of the Chinese children have influenced the education system — particularly at secondary and university levels — so that the Chinese language has eclipsed Tibetan as the medium for schooling. The evolution of Tibet's education system in the 1990s can be assessed from the situation of "mass education" in Chamdo prefecture — one of the "TAR's" most affluent regions. An article by Shang Xioling, a reporter for "TAR" Radio, and Tang Ching, special reporter on "TAR" education, gives an alarming insight into the educational conditions in and around Chamdo. Their article, headlined "Notes on the Sad Story of Education in Chamdo", was published in the July 15, 1993 edition of one of Chamdo's Chinese-language newspapers.

The authors reveal that of the 110,000 school-age children in Chamdo, more than 70,000 (63.64 percent) had no educational opportunity. They reported that the illiteracy

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<sup>23</sup> *Chinese Education and Society*, July/August 1997, vol.30, issue 4

and semi-literacy rate of Chamdo prefecture was 78.8 percent. Shang and Tang wrote that although the claimed average school enrolment rate in the "TAR" was 60.4 percent, the enrolment rate in Chamdo prefecture was only 34 percent.

These revelations from Shang and Tang expose the dubious quality of Chinese government statistics. If Chamdo — as one of the most highly developed areas in the "TAR" — had an enrolment rate of only 34 percent, the "TAR" average in the same period could not be as high as 60.4 percent.

Furthermore, what the authorities fail to admit is that the "TAR" and other Tibetan areas of Amdo and Kham are still at the bottom of China's education index — lower even than Guizhou, China's most backward province.<sup>24</sup> According to China's Fourth National Census of 1990, only 0.29 percent of Tibetans had a college-level education; 1.23 percent senior-middle schooling; 2.47 percent junior-middle schooling; and 18.52 percent primary school education. China's national average was 1.42 percent with college level education, 8.04 percent senior middle school, 23.34 percent junior middle school, and 37.06 percent primary school education.

The census report showed that 62.85 percent of the productive population (between the age group of 15-40) was illiterate or semi-literate and 84.76 percent of women in the work force was illiterate or semi-literate. Among Tibetans employed in the "TAR's" public sector industries, 80 percent were illiterate or semi-literate.<sup>25</sup> China's Fifth National

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<sup>24</sup> UNDP's *China Human Development Report*, 1997

<sup>25</sup> *Chinese Education and Society* July/August 1997, vol.30, issue 4



Census was conducted on November 1, 2000, but statistical data is not yet available.

In the late 1990s, more than one third of Tibetan secondary students from the "TAR" were sent to China for education. In Beijing's Tibet Middle School alone, there are nearly 1,000 Tibetan students — 760 in junior and 200 in secondary programmes.<sup>26</sup> Students sent to China undertake seven-year courses; they return home only once for vacation. The aim of sending Tibet's brightest youths to China is to groom them as tools for China's political control in Tibet.

Tibetans rightfully resent this as a policy aimed at undermining their identity and culture. The late Panchen Lama stated that educating Tibetan children in China would only have the effect of alienating them from their cultural roots. Similarly, a Tibetan official in the "TAR" said that the aim of setting up "Tibetan secondary schools in central China is to assimilate the next Tibetan generation"<sup>27</sup>.

By 1994 there were 13,000 Tibetans enrolled in 104 schools scattered across 26 Chinese provinces. The majority of these are normal Chinese schools with special classes designated for Tibetans. However, 18 of them are full-fledged "Tibetan Secondary Schools"; three of them — based in Beijing, Chengdu and Tianjin — have junior and senior secondary programmes, while the remaining ones have junior secondary programmes only. Seventy-five percent of Tibetans graduating

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<sup>26</sup> *South China Morning Post*, 21 March 2001, "Education on the Move", R.J. Michaels

<sup>27</sup> Internal Party Discussion Paper, 1995, quoted by Catriona Bass in *Education in Tibet-Policy and Practice since 1950*, Zed Books, London, p. 151

from these junior secondary schools were sent to technical secondary schools.<sup>28</sup>

Such an elitist education programme consumes a large portion of the "TAR's" annual education budget while rural Tibet's allotment does not even provide for adequate basic education. Between 1984 and 1991, the "TAR" spent 53 million yuan on Tibetan secondary students in China.<sup>29</sup> In 1994 alone, the "TAR" fixed a yearly budget of 1,050 yuan on each Tibetan secondary student in China.<sup>30</sup>

In 1988, the late Panchen Lama, while addressing the first meeting of the Institute of Tibetology in Beijing, commented, "The land, which managed itself well for 1,300 years, from the seventh century, lost its language after it was liberated. Whether we remained backward or made mistakes, we managed our life on the world's highest plateau by using only Tibetan. We had everything written in our own language, be it Buddhism, crafts, astronomy, poems, logic. All administrative works were also done in Tibetan. When the Institute of Tibetology was founded, I spoke in the People's Palace and said that the Tibetan studies should be based on the foundation of Tibet's own religion and culture. So far we have underestimated these subjects. ...It may not be the deliberate goal of the Party to let Tibetan culture die, but I wonder whether the Tibetan language will survive or be eradicated."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *Beijing Review*, 7–13 August 1995; *Xinhua* in SWB, 2 August 1994, quoted in Bass's *Education in Tibet: Policy and Practice Since 1950*, p. 150

<sup>29</sup> *Xizang Ribao (Tibet Daily)*, 28 February 1991

<sup>30</sup> *Xinhua*, 2 March 1994; SWB 4 March 1994

<sup>31</sup> 'Kunsik Panchen Rinpoche ka-tzom che-drik, Department of Information and International Relations, Dharamsala 1999, p. 84



In 1992 Professor Dungkar Lobsang Trinley — one of modern Tibet's leading cultural and intellectual figures who was also recognised by the Chinese leadership as a "national treasure" — said that "in spite of Tibetan being declared the first language to be used in all government offices and meetings, and in official correspondence, Chinese has been used everywhere as the working language." This state of affairs, he argued, resulted in Tibetans losing control over their destiny. Professor Dungkar went on to say, "All hope in our future, all other developments, cultural identity, and protection of our heritage depends on this (Tibetan language). Without educated people in all fields, able to express themselves in their own language, Tibetans are in danger of being assimilated. We have reached this point."

Dherong Tsering Thondup, another scholar in Tibet, raised a similar concern after conducting a detailed survey of the status of Tibetan language in many parts of eastern Tibet. In his report, published in the early 1990s, Dherong wrote that out of the 6,044 Tibetan party members and officials in the nine districts forming Karze Tibet Autonomous Prefecture, only 991 were literate in Tibetan. Similarly, the majority of the 25 Tibetan students in one class in Dhartsedo could not speak Tibetan at all. Dherong cited three principal reasons for this: The first, he said, is the Chinese government's chauvinistic policy, which accelerates the process of Sinicisation; the second is the notion of Tibetan being a worthless language in today's society; and the third, the inferiority complex suffered by Tibetans, which hampers their initiatives to protect their own language.

All such evidence suggests that the educational opportunity created in Tibet by China's "earth-shattering" advancement

over the past five decades is woefully inadequate for the needs of Tibetans. It lags far behind what the exile Tibetans, who came empty-handed to India in 1959, have achieved in the field.

The exile Tibetan community today has 87 schools with an enrolment of 30,000 students, constituting 85 percent of school-age children. Today, education in exile has produced medical doctors, administrators, Ph.Ds., M.Phils., engineers, post graduate teachers, journalists, social workers, lawyers, computer programmers, etc. This is due mainly to the support of the Government of India which, in contrast to Beijing, takes no credit for its role.

In addition, there are over 200 monasteries and nunneries in exile with around 20,000 monks and nuns. Small wonder then that younger Tibetans risk their lives crossing the Himalayan mountains to receive a decent education in India.

## Health Service

Between 1959-1979, the Communist campaign against the "four olds" also targeted the traditional Tibetan healing system. Tibetan medical institutes were closed down.

Traditional medical professionals, who had honed their skills over a lifetime, were replaced by "barefoot doctors", who had only six months to one year of training. Most of these paramedics — between the age group of 15-19 — had no formal education before their training.<sup>32</sup> Foreign visitors to

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<sup>32</sup> A. Tom Grunfeld, *The Making of Modern Tibet*, Zed Books Ltd, London, 1987, p.175



Tibet during that period recorded an increase in the incidence of cancer, dysentery and diarrhoea.<sup>33</sup>

After the economic liberalisation in 1979, there has been a noticeable improvement in health care facilities, at least in urban areas. Nevertheless, the standard of health care remained much lower than in the rest of China.<sup>34</sup> Dawa Tsering — a young Tibetan who returned to Tibet from exile and studied at the National Minorities Institute in Siling, Amdo, between 1979-1981 — said that the hospitals in Siling provided free treatment to students and cadres, but ordinary people had to pay. "Except for emergency cases, treatment of ordinary Tibetans in these hospitals is very casual", he said.<sup>35</sup> A British teacher with Voluntary Service Overseas, who spent a year at Lhasa University in 1987, said that the medical service in Lhasa City was so appalling that "Chinese people would rather fly home than be admitted in Lhasa". Recollecting her visits to a friend in hospital in Lhasa, she said: "I never saw a nurse in the three days I visited. Visitors wandered in at any time in any numbers. The doctor attending her smoked. There was no curtain for privacy when she used the bedpan — neither from other patients and their relatives, nor from the outside world through the window. She was afraid to eat the food provided or drink the water, and lived on biscuits and sweets brought by friends."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Lhasa*, Han Suyin, pp.101-106, cited by A. Tom Grunfeld

<sup>34</sup> *The Tibetans*, C. Mullin, , Minority Rights Group, London, 1981, p. 12, cited by Paul Ingram in *Tibet: The Facts*, p. 44

<sup>35</sup> *Tibetan Review*, Vol. XVI. No. 7, July 1981, "Tibet and China's Policy of Liberalization: Some Personal Observations", p. 17

<sup>36</sup> *Tibetan Review*, Vol. XXIII. No. 4, April 1988, "Experience of an English Teacher at Lhasa University", Julie Brittain

Tuberculosis is widely prevalent in Tibet. A journal of the *International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases* reported in early 1988 that the prevalence of tuberculosis was highest in Xinjiang and Tibet. The report added that the "TAR's" prevalence rate of 1.26 percent and smear positive rate of 0.316 percent were twice as high as China's entire prevalence rate of 0.72 percent and smear positive rate of 0.19 percent.<sup>37</sup>

The status of health in Tibet, particularly among children, is clearly revealed in the findings of the survey conducted between 1993 and 1996 by the Tibet Child Nutrition and Collaborative Health Project. The TCNP found evidence of chronic malnutrition and severely compromised health status. "Fifty-two percent of children examined showed signs of severe stunting (low height-for-age); over 40 percent of the children showed signs of protein energy malnutrition; and 67 percent were diagnosed with clinical rickets (a bone disease most frequently caused by vitamin D deficiency)".<sup>38</sup>

Despite these reports, Chinese official publications continue to claim great improvements in the health care system. According to the Chinese authorities, there were 1,300 medical establishments and 6,700 hospital beds in the "TAR" in 1998.<sup>39</sup> The authorities also maintain that "medical institutions can be found everywhere" in Tibet.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Tibetan Review*, Vol. XXIII. No. 7 July 1988, "Health Problems in Tibet Today" Tseten Samdup

<sup>38</sup> *International Child Health*, October 1996, Vol. VII, No. 4, pp. 99-114

<sup>39</sup> *China's White Paper on Human Rights*, Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, , Beijing, February 2000

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*



But the fact is that the health service in Tibet is highly skewed in favour of urban dwellers, who are predominantly Chinese. The inhabitants of agricultural and pastoral areas have to travel for a whole day or so by horse or yak to county capitals or larger towns for treatment. Even in urban areas, admission to an in-patient department in a government hospital demands a deposit of 500 to 3,000 yuan — an unreasonable sum for ordinary Tibetans whose average annual per capita income now is 1,258 yuan (about US\$151.56).<sup>41</sup>

One consequence of the poor health service for Tibetans and the bad state of public hygiene, is higher mortality rates for Tibetans than Chinese. In 1981, according to the reports of the World Bank in 1984 and of the UNDP in 1991, crude death rates per thousand were 7.48 in the “TAR” and 9.92 in Amdo, as against an average of 6.6 in China. Child mortality rates are also disproportionately high: 150 per thousand against 43 for China.

Similarly, in 1995, Tibet ranked lowest on China’s life expectancy index and education index with 0.58 and 0.32 respectively, which are well below China’s national average of 0.73 and 0.68 respectively.

## **The Human Rights Situation**

The escape of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, followed by thousands of Tibetans to exile in 1959, and the military clampdown that subsequently took place in Tibet, became

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<sup>41</sup> *News from China*, Embassy of the PRC, New Delhi, “Market Economy: Prerequisite to Tibet’s Modernization”, 22 November 2000

international media headlines. The brutal reprisals meted out to Tibetans involved in the uprising against Chinese rule, and the violently-expressed Chinese communist intolerance towards Tibetan Buddhism, prompted the General Assembly of the United Nations to pass three separate resolutions in 1959, 1961 and 1965 condemning the Chinese authorities' violations of the fundamental human rights and freedoms of the Tibetan people, including their right to self-determination. In the 1961 resolution on the Tibet situation, the General Assembly renewed "its call for the cessation of all practices which deprive the Tibetan people of human rights and fundamental freedoms which they have always enjoyed".

Despite the Chinese white paper's claim that since then there had been a cumulative improvement in the human rights situation in Tibet, the UN Sub-commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minority Rights, based in Geneva, in its 1991 resolution on the situation in Tibet expressed concern at "the continuing violations of fundamental human rights and freedoms which threaten the distinct cultural, religious and national identity of the Tibetan people". It called upon China to "fully respect the fundamental human rights and freedoms of the Tibetan people..."

Prompted by reports of widespread killing and destruction in Tibet, the International Commission of Jurists published a preliminary report in 1959 called *The Question of Tibet and the Rule of Law*. In 1960 the Legal Inquiry Committee of the International Commission of Jurists submitted its findings to the Commission in a report called *Tibet and the Chinese*



*People's Republic.* In the report, the Legal Inquiry Committee stated, "The evidence placed before the Legal Inquiry Committee satisfied them that the Chinese in Tibet intended to destroy such a religious group, namely Buddhists in Tibet... The evidence shows that conspicuous religious figures have been killed in an attempt to induce others to give up their faith. It also shows that large numbers of the new generation of Tibetans are transferred by force to an environment where the old religion cannot reach them. These acts are part of a general design to eradicate religious faith in Tibet, and by so doing to destroy the religious group. In brief, acts condemned as genocidal have been committed to destroy Buddhism in Tibet, and the intent is that there shall be no Buddhists left there."

## **Quest for a Lasting Solution**

Contrary to what is portrayed in the latest Chinese white paper, Tibet consists of Cholka-sum — the three provinces of U-Tsang, Kham and Amdo, with a total area of 2.5 million sq. kms and a population of about six million. When the Chinese government refers to Tibet it acknowledges only to the so-called "Tibet Autonomous Region" ("TAR") which mainly consists of U-Tsang and some parts of Kham, with an area of 1.2 million sq. kms and only one third of Tibet's total population. Most of Amdo and small areas of Kham are now merged to form the new Chinese province of "Qinghai" while the rest of Amdo and Kham are merged into China's existing provinces of Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan.

Tibet was an independent country in fact and in law when China invaded in 1949. This military takeover constitutes the

invasion of a sovereign state and clearly violated international law. Today's continued illegal occupation of Tibet by China, reinforced by a strong military presence, constitutes an ongoing violation of international law and the fundamental right of the Tibetan people to self-determination.

For these reasons, instead of issuing self-serving white papers, it is absolutely necessary for China to dismantle its colonial structure in Tibet. The current policies of intensifying repression and escalating development activities — first enforced by the Third Work Forum on Tibet and strongly endorsed by the Fourth Work Forum — are formulas for trouble. Everyone in the world, except the hard-line leadership in Beijing, considers the current policy short-sighted and bound to prove disastrous in the long run.

Melvyn C. Goldstein, a Tibet scholar quoted approvingly in the latest Chinese white paper to buttress Beijing's claims that the old Tibetan society was feudal, has this to say about Beijing's hardline policy. In an article on Tibet in the January-February 1998 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, he wrote, "Many Chinese experts and moderates question whether the current policy will produce the long-term stability that China wants in Tibet because it is exacerbating the alienation of Tibetans, even young ones, intensifying their feelings of ethnic hatred and political hopelessness, and inculcating the idea that Tibetans' nationalist aspirations cannot be met so long as Tibet is part of the People's Republic of China."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Foreign Affairs*, "The Dalai Lama's Dilemma" Melvyn C. Goldstein, Council on Foreign Relations, New York, January-February 1998



Goldstein substantiates his statement by commenting, "The crux of the matter is that Tibetans are unlikely to sit by much longer watching Beijing transform their homeland with impunity. Nationalistic sentiment combined with desperation and anger make a powerful brew, and there are Tibetans, inside and outside, who favour a campaign of focused violence."<sup>43</sup>

The views of Melvyn Goldstein are echoed by Chinese scholars living in the PRC. Wang Lixiong, author of the Chinese bestseller, *The Yellow Peril*, in his article titled *The Dalai Lama is the Key to the Tibet Issue*, writes, "From China's point of view, these reasons make the Tibetan issue far more sensitive than the Xinjiang issue. The characteristics of the Tibetan issue are: historical uncertainty regarding China's sovereignty, internationalised issue, support from the western society, an effective exile government, a spiritual leader who is revered by Tibetans and is influential worldwide." Wang also writes in the same article, "Therefore, if one considers the long-term interests of China, it is not wise to forestall the issue. And, it is even a bigger mistake to wait for the Dalai Lama to die. This policy is misguided."

Wang strongly recommends that China "must seize the present opportunity and start the process of finding a solution to the Tibetan issue while the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama is alive and in good health. An early initiative is necessary to achieve permanent stability with one single effort. Bidding for time is neither in the interest of the Dalai Lama, nor of China. In fact, it is China that will come out far worse.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid

"China should not regard the Dalai Lama as an obstacle to resolving the issue of Tibet, but as the key to a lasting solution. However, if the issue is not resolved well, the key that can open the big door can also lock it."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *The Dalai Lama is the Key to the Tibet Issue* written by Wang Lixiong in Lhasa and Beijing May-July 2000. Department of Information and International Relations, Dharamsala, 2001





*"Height of Darkness: Chinese Colonialism on the World's Roof"* is in response to the white paper on China's claims to have modernised Tibet, issued by the State Council of the People's Republic of China on 8 November 2001. The Tibetan response is a study of the hidden agenda behind China's frantic efforts to reinforce colonialism in Tibet. After the Chinese communist occupation of Tibet, perhaps this is the biggest disaster to confront the Tibetan people. Despite the brutality of the Cultural Revolution, China was not able to wipe out Tibet's gentle civilisation whose rich spiritual tradition even now vibrates well beyond Tibet. Where brute military might and outright political repression has failed, China now is attempting to exterminate Tibet's unique way of life through renewed colonisation".

Samdhong Rinpoche  
Kalon Tripa and Kalon for the Department of  
Information and International Relations